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ABSTRACT

Interest in oral traditions has benefitted the field of interpretation in two ways: a new emphasis on the social and cultural contexts of performance, and an expanded perspective on performance manifestations. In Richard Schechner's concept of "restored behavior," the interpreter engages in a reconstruction of living behavior independent of its causal systems. Faced with the linguistic and aesthetic problems that result when materials are taken out of their social and cultural contexts, the interpreter uses rehearsal to begin the process of restoration. The interpreter's goal, emic performance, is restored behavior built on discoveries of native categories of information and action. Audiences must also be taught new roles when responding to the emic performance. The final challenge for the interpreter of the oral tradition is defining the cultural role of the performer. This sort of interpretation requires a methodology based on deduction, drawn from multiple, intercultural observations of those restorations of behavior that are culturally defined, enjoyed, and created as verbal art. (JL)

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RESTORED BEHAVIOR AND ORAL TRADITIONS

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Interpretation and the Oral Tradition

Interest in oral traditions has benefitted the field of Interpretation in at least two significant ways: a new emphasis on the social and cultural contexts of performance, and an expanded perspective on performance manifestations.

From this new perspective interpreters can see that the relationship between the interpreter and the literature, whether written or oral, does not exist in a social or cultural vacuum. Interpretation is a "situated behavior."[1] By its very nature performance is emergent within its social and cultural context. Cultural settings, relationships to social institutions and events, and cultural conventions shape the context of performance. True performance occurs only with the confluence of competencies and goals of both performer and audience, in an interplay of communicative, and expressive resources in context.[2] With literature from the oral tradition the interpreter's emergent "text" is both embedded in and derived from its art and its society.[3]

A second and equally important benefit to the field of Interpretation from the current focus on the oral tradition is an increase in both the forms and materials of performance. By opening our perspectives onto other performance materials and forms we increase our range of study and activity. The literature we have studied in the past has been almost exclusively taken from the Euro-American, written tradition. Not only did we overlook the forms of our own living traditions, as when we frowned at our students' selections of tall tales, ghost stories, or song lyrics, but our ethnocentric perspective excluded the rich and varied manifestations of verbal art in much of the world's cultures. We are still in need of the American-based ethnographic research which Fine and Speer called for in their 1977 article, "A New Look at Performance," so that we may begin to understand "interpretive performance in our own culture, describing what is rather than pri-

marily suggesting what should be."[4]

I would add to their suggestion my belief that an interpreter's understanding of an embodiment of literature is incomplete until the interpreter understands performance with an intercultural perspective, particularly with a perspective developed from a study of those cultures where "literature" exists as performance, a living verbal art. Interpreters have yet to apply their insights to the immense body of material that the oral traditions make available to us.[5] Perhaps before we can fully comprehend interpretive performance in our own culture we must see what it is in another culture. As Clifford Geertz said in his concluding statement to The Interpretation of Culture, "societies, like lives, contain their own interpretations. One has only to learn how to gain access to them."[6]

I would like now to look at some of the possible accesses available for the interpreter of the oral tradition. I shall be using a theoretical model, or metaphor, for performance of oral literature. The model is based on intercultural studies of performance, and it applies to the contextual and transformational variables that are characteristic of the oral tradition. And I will be suggesting some performance standards for the oral tradition, for, while capable of revitalizing our research and our presentations, the oral tradition also provides us with new dilemmas and challenges.

The Restoration of Behavior

For the theatre director and performance theoretican Richard Schechner, the main characteristic of performance is the use of restored behavior. This restored behavior is distinct from the performer:

> Restored behavior is living behavior treated as a film director treats a strip of film. These strips can be rearranged, reconstructed; they are independent of the causal systems (social, psychological, technological) that brought them into existence; they have a life of their own. The original "truth" or "motivation" of the behavior may be lost, ignored, or contradicted. How the strip of behavior was made, found, developed may be unknown or

> covered over, elaborated, distorted by myth. Originating as a process, used in the process of rehearsal to make a new process--a performance--the strips of behavior are not themselves processes but things, items, "material."[7]

Schechner is applying postmodern information theory to performance; it is information, not things, that is the basic building block of nature itself. Nature and culture are constructs of bits of information, and both nature and culture are potentially reconstructible in new orders. Schechner sees both traditional and innovative performance as an information system whose cultural causes and uses may or may not be restored in succeeding performances. It was after extensive observations of performances throughout Asia that Schechner wrote a performance theory which reflects the complex array of oral and written, traditional, transitional, and innovative performances he had studied.

Schechner's concept of a "restoration of behavior" is important for Interpretation because the interpreter, after discovering performance materials and forms in an oral tradition, engages in a reconstruction of living behavior independent of its causal systems. Schechner is not unaware of the dilemmas that intercultural performances present, and much of his discussion in the article concerns the reflexivity, or lack of it, in theme parks, in the filming of extinct rituals, and other examples of the theatricalization of anthropology. Restorations can heal seamlessly into a culture: Bharata Natyam is a living tradition in present-day India, yet this dance-drama is a restoration of very recent time which is based on ancient sources. Restoration of behavior, whether within its own cultural settings or reaching across cultural or temporal boundaries, "is not a process of scraping away dead layers of paint to reveal the original artwork; it is not discovering an unbroken--dare I say, unconscious?--tradition, but of research and fieldwork, of rehearsals in the deepest sense."[8] The performance of literature from an oral tradition reconstructs a living behavior, the "information" of a culture's verbal art. The restoration of behavior from the oral tradition

presents several linguistic and aesthetic difficulties. Taken out of their social and cultural contexts, and, frequently, translated from their original language, the materials or methods of an oral tradition undergo a transitional-liminal process. While no longer embedded in their original social and cultural matrix, the materials and methods of any oral tradition are suspended in the subjunctive mood of rehearsal, Stanislavski's "as if" state.

Rehearsal begins the process of restoration, and can be compared to the separation phase of Victor Turner's ritual process.[9] Interpreter and material interface as information systems which belong neither to their past state nor to the state-that-is-to be. Change and choice are key forces in this suspension phase. Restoration of of behavior always involves choices, and in the suspended liminal phase the interpreter explores the material by examining, building, selecting, and rejecting behaviors, eventually assembling the behaviors and their sequences. This rehearsal of materials from the oral traditions must be done in Schechner's "deepest sense," what Geertz called a "thick description," if the interpreter is to complete the transition to performance which is the equivalent of the reintegration phase of Turner's ritual process.

Even with annotations on oral delivery such as the system developed by Dennis Tedlock[10] or with audio and visual recordings[11] the written texts of originally oral materials, when available, are incomplete, secondary bits of information. Using Schechner's comparison of restorations to the strips of a film, we see that the verbal art from the oral tradition is created by the interpreter in the restoration of behavior. The accuracy or authenticity of the interpreter's creation, like the filmmaker's, is symbolic and reflexive. The deeper the rehearsal process, the fuller and richer are the choices and the connections of symbolic and reflexive behavior.

Blurred genres and modes of thought are another aspect of this problem of accuracy and authenticity in the oral tradition. Genre distinctions from our written

tradition have limited application to the expressive traditions of the world's peoples. For example, how should we categorize the performance form of India called Kathakali--a collaboration of music, theatre, song, story, dance, and ritual, using highly stylized gestures, movements, and costumes? Song, music, and dance emerge in Kathakali performance. And what of Afro-American toasts, or the "talking sweet" in a West Indies "tea meeting," a speechmaking event for display of verbal competence and artistry?[12] Both the interpreter and his or her audience are challenged by the diversity and distinctions of the many oral traditions.

Emic Performance

The interpreter is like the ethnographer who seeks the emic description, a description which uses native categories and perceptions.[13] Emic performance is restored behavior built on discoveries of native categories of information and action. Though independent of its social, psychological, and technological causal systems, emic performance brings the materials of the oral tradition to a performative life which reflects the genres and the modes of thought of a culture, and reveals it restored to a new audience. Although the interpreter begins with the etic response in which initial perceptions see the material as like a familiar genre, the emic response is created in the rehearsal process. For example, the interpreter would begin with an etic response to Native American coyote tales, for initially the interpreter sees them as like the familiar Euro-American narratives. Restoration of behavior enables the transformation of performer and material into emic performance and restores the ritualistic and culturally symbolic dimensions to the coyote tales. In addition to being able to restore the coyote tales' distinction as a genre through the rehearsal process, the interpreter is able to explore the Native American performance norms for coyote tales. In the rehearsal process the interpreter chooses the behaviors to restore. The profoundly civilizing and humanizing power of the art of Interpretation which Wallace Bacon has encouraged can serve no more valuable purpose for the interpreter than to enable an emic perception

to be transformed into emic performance.

A challenge to the interpreter and to the audience of oral literature is the new paradigm for performance relationships. Unlike the original audience who brought their culturally shared codes of behaviors, often including active participation and signals of reception, the interpreter's audience for the materials from the oral tradition usually begins without a behavior, or rather they are in the process of discovering and creating a new one. Audiences well-trained in our usual, polite, passive, Euro-American audience behavior may be disconcerting for a storyteller of Bahamian tales since they are built on active audience participation with loud and frequent shouts of "Bunday!," a marker word for their old-stories. But imagine how disconcerting shouts of "Bunday!" might be for a novice storyteller experienced only in our conventions. The oral tradition enlarges the range of possible behaviors for both interpreter and audience. The audience is asked to enter into the subjunctive mood of the oral performance, and is a new and unknown factor in the performance's emergence. As Leland H. Roloff states, "The performer of literature translates language into a behavioral act, into a moment that is pure transformation for him and his listener."[14] The oral tradition reminds us again how significant the transformation is for the listener as well.

A final challenge for the interpreter of the oral tradition is our cultural role as performers. It is a part of the question asked by Marcella Oberle, "What is our profession?" The role of the interpreter as we have defined it in the past is at variance with that of the verbal artist of the oral tradition. The art of interpretation is not in studying a (written) literature through performance, but in the living, emergent form resulting from the study-rehearsal process. The interpreter of oral traditions is actively engaged in a creative and socially collaborative restoration. Either as an oral composer who is steeped in a culture, its context, values, and traditions or as a performer of previously, orally composed literature, the interpreter's embodiment is in the emergence of text as emic per-

formance. Emic performance reintegrates the restored behavior into a social system. The verbal artist of orally transmitted materials is responsible for measuring the emergent "text" against the emic standards of its tradition, and for measuring it against the standards of the audience of its restoration. Though the interpreter cannot always do this easily, our artistry and our integrity ask that we attempt no less in the rehearsal-into-performance process.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude with two brief examples from works-in-progress in the oral tradition in order to illustrate restorations of behavior created by and for performance. Dwight Conquergood's immersion in the life of his Laotian refugee informants is an example of the "deep rehearsal" of behavior that the ethnographer and the performing artist must be engaged in. We have seen how Laotian life histories, traditions, and transitions can be restored in his remarkable, emic performances. My second example is more personal and more liminal. It began when I wrote a play based on Bahamian folktales collected by Daniel J. Crowley, spurred by my own fascination with the material and Crowley's notion that "Folklore is more in the nature of theatre than of literature."[16] In the process of writing the play I found myself creating songs for the stories and the storytellers. Though not a part of the original ethnographer's data, the songs became essential to the restoration of behavior as a play. Since I do not read or write music, I now have music collaborators who are engaged with their own materials in another restoration of behavior. This play-in-progress (now emerging as a "folk musical") has moved us all in unexpected behaviors and creations.

Like the ethnographer, the interpreter of the oral tradition is never certain of what will be found nor how much can be known about it. Both the interpreter and the ethnographer seeks the Geertzian "thick description" that will communicate to the outsider the full context and meaning of a culture in all its human dimensions. The oral tradition speaks in the voices of a people, a time, and a place,

and within those voices is everything. Interpreters who find their concern is as much for humanity as for literature will find the oral tradition a rich source of study and creativity.

Rather than theoretical or speculative statements about the process or purpose of Interpretation, a focus on oral tradition can lead to a renewal of our art as we locate and respond to the intercultural manifestations of verbal art, and as we seek and achieve restorations of behaviors from the oral tradition, including our own. The field of Interpretation has yet to develop its own vocabulary or methodology for the analysis of performance. The terms of literary analysis which are applicable to the text do not describe the concerns or practices of oral performance. Nor does the recent interest in post-structuralism provide a solution, for the untestable, causal speculations on the internal, unobservable mental processes of performer and audience yield further statements of what should or might be rather than what <u>is</u>. Interpretation requires a methodology based on deduction, drawn from multiple, intercultural observations of those restorations of behavior that are culturally defined, enjoyed, and created as Verbal Art. This is what we are about--and, if this conference is an indication--it is what we are about to do, and about to be.

FOOTNOTES

1. Richard Bauman, Verbal Art as Performance (Rowley, Massachusetts, 1977), p. 27.
2. Bauman, ch. 5. See also Dell Hymes, "Breakthrough into Performance" in Folklore: Performance and Communication, eds. Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth Goldstein (The Hague, 1975).
3. See Robert Georges, "Toward an Understanding of Storytelling Events," Journal of American Folklore, 82 (1969), 313-328; Regna Darnell, "Correlates of Cree Narrative Performance" in Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking, eds. Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer (New York, 1974); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "A Parable in Context: A Social Interactional Analysis of Storytelling Performance" in Folklore: Performance and Communication, op. cit.
4. Elizabeth C. Fine and Jean Haskell Speer, "A New Look at Performance," Communication Monographs, 44 (November, 1977), 383.
5. See Ruth Finnegan, Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context (Cambridge, 1977) and A World Treasury of Oral Poetry ed. and intro. by Ruth Finnegan (Bloomington, Indiana, 1978) for some examples of oral poetry. For an overview of oral narratives see Ann Pellowski, The World of Storytelling (New York, 1977).
6. Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Culture (New York, 1973), p. 453.
7. Richard Schechner, "The Restoration of Behavior," Studies in Visual Communication (Summer, 1981), 1. An earlier version appears in A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology, ed. Jay Ruby (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).
8. Schechner, p. 21.
9. Victor Turner, Drama, Fields, and Metaphors (Cornell University Press, 1974), esp. ch. 1, "Social Dramas and Ritual Metaphors," also in Ritual, Play, and

Performance: Readings in the Social Sciences/Theatre, eds. Richard Schechner and Mady Schuman (New York, 1976). Turner's most recent discussion is "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual" in From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play (New York, 1982).

10. Dennis Tedlock, Finding the Center: Narrative Poetry of the Zuni Indians (University of Nebraska Press, 1978).

11. See A Crack in the Mirror, ed. Jay Ruby, op. cit. for an extensive discussion of recording and reflexivity.

12. Roger Abrahams, Deep Down in the Jungle (Chicago, 1970); "The Training of a Man of Words in Talking Sweet" in Verbal Art as Performance, op. cit.; "Wake Amusement and the Structure of Nonsense on St. Vincent," Journal of American Folklore, 95 (1982), 389-414.

13. From Kenneth Pike, Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior, 2nd ed. (The Hague, 1967). See James P. Spradley, The Ethnographic Interview (New York, 1979), and James P. Spradley and David W. McCurdy, The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society (Chicago, 1972) for useful guidance in ethnological methodology and goals.

14. Leland H. Roloff, The Perception and Evocation of Literature (Glenview, Illinois, 1973), p. 8.

15. Daniel J. Crowley, I Could Talk Old Story Good: Creativity in Bahamian Folklore (University of California Press, 1966), p. 140.